



Senator

RANDI BECKER

2nd Legislative District

Legislative Report • Spring 2012



Senator Randi Becker

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Dear Friends and Neighbors,

I hope you find this report informative and helpful. The Legislature dealt with some big issues this year and I was directly involved in many of them. I am providing this report to you because I believe it is very important that you know what your elected officials are doing on your behalf.

Communication with 2nd District residents is a priority for me and I hope that you will sign up for my e-mail updates so that I may keep you regularly informed.

If you have any questions on the issues discussed in this newsletter or other issues before the Legislature, please do not hesitate to contact me. I encourage e-mails because there is no cost involved.

I hope to see you at community events over the next few months. It is an honor to serve the 2nd District in the Washington State Senate. Thank you for this opportunity.

Sincerely,

Senator Randi Becker

SIGN UP FOR MY E-MAIL UPDATES

Please e-mail me so I can add your name to my constituent e-mail list – it is a great way for me to keep you informed without the cost of printing and postage.

CHANGING THE CULTURE IN OLYMPIA

I came to Olympia this year committed to solving the continuing budget crisis with real change. That change had to include structural reforms that reduce the costs of state government. We've had a huge budget hole since 2009, not because of a revenue shortfall; on the contrary, revenue has continued to grow – just not as fast as spending. We needed to change the way the state does business.

I supported three major reforms: 1) reducing the cost of the state's pension system; 2) lowering the state's debt limit; and 3) requiring operating budgets to balance over four years. I am happy to report that bipartisan agreements were reached on all three reforms and they were approved by the full Legislature.

- **Senate Bill 6636** – This measure requires budgets to balance across four years, meaning the current two-year cycle plus the next two years, before they are adopted. This requirement, thought to be the first of its kind in the nation, will force legislators to consider the long-term costs that go with their spending choices, and reduce the chance that one biennium's budget will lead to a big deficit in the next biennium.
- **Senate Joint Resolution 8221** – This constitutional amendment lowers the state's debt limit from 9.0 percent to 8.0 percent by July 1, 2034. Debt payment is one of the fastest-growing parts of the operating budget, rising from 4.8 percent of near-general fund revenues 10 years ago to more than 6 percent this year – and a total cost of nearly \$2 billion this biennium. SJR 8221 will appear on the November 2012 ballot for voters to decide.
- **Senate Bill 6378** – This measure reduces early retirement benefits for state employees hired after May 1, 2013. The change does not affect current employees. It will produce a savings of \$1.3 billion over 25 years.

THE BUDGET

One of the most disappointing processes for me this year was the loss of the bipartisan effort in the Senate to act early and pass a balanced, sustainable budget within existing revenues. Coming into the 2012 session, I served as an advisor on health care issues related to the budget and attended Senate Ways & Means Committee hearings on the state's fiscal situation, even though I am not a member of that body. I wanted to be as informed as possible when it came time to make the difficult choices.

The voice of the minority

On day 54 of the regular 60-day session, it became clear that the budget process in the Senate was stalled. We needed a Senate budget on the table to start negotiations with the House of Representatives. So, three Democrat senators joined with the 22 Republican senators to form a majority coalition and used a long-standing Senate rule allowing a procedural motion to go to the 9th Order of Business. At this point, the coalition was able to bring the budget bill out of the Senate Ways and Means Committee for a full Senate vote. This procedural motion is a vital part of how our system gives a voice to the minority.

Following the 9th Order motion, the coalition offered a striking amendment to the budget bill, which is essentially a whole new bill. It was a long night; but eventually the budget bill, as amended by the coalition, passed on a vote of 25 to 24.

Logjam

With two budget proposals now on the table (the House majority had passed its budget plan on February 29) I was expecting the budget-writers to sit down and work out a plan both chambers could support. Sadly, that did not happen. The clock kept ticking and on the final day of the regular session, the House majority passed another budget that would have created a \$2 billion deficit in the 2013-15 biennium. That was unacceptable to me and unacceptable to the coalition. This logjam forced us into special session.

Negotiating, compromise and adjournment go hand-in-hand

After the special session convened on March 12, I was on 24-hour call to return to the Capitol to finish our business. Budget-writers met almost daily. I continued to work on my other legislative duties. I came to Olympia for meetings, attended in-district meetings and met with constituents on a number of issues.

Marathon:

It took an all-night session starting on the last day of the first special session, April 10, to pass a budget, bills necessary to implement the budgets and the long-term reforms, but we did it!

The \$31.1 billion supplemental operating budget makes no cuts to K-12 and higher education, and preserves services for our most vulnerable citizens. Also, the bipartisan coalition plan's architecture – which includes a \$320 million reserve – gives it a good chance of remaining in balance until mid-2013.

The supplemental capital budget will create an estimated 18,000 family-wage construction jobs on ready-to-go state projects with a focus on higher education facility needs and skills centers.

The landmark reforms we approved will help put state government on more stable financial ground.



A NEW ROLE FOR THE STATE IN HIGHER EDUCATION GOVERNANCE

As a member of the Governor's Steering Committee on Higher Education, I attended several work sessions over the 2011-12 interim to answer the question: What is the state's most appropriate role in higher education governance?

My commitment to a successful outcome created dozens of other meetings for me with representatives from the higher education community, the business community, students, interested citizens, and policy staff.

Since 1985, higher education governance has been the duty of the Higher Education Coordinating Board. However, over the years the HEC Board was assigned so many duties and obligations that these tasks became a constant distraction to how higher education policy should move forward.

State-governance should only focus on issues of statewide significance. My priority was and always will be improving student achievement.

Two bills resulted from the steering committee's work. I introduced Senate Bill 6269; and Senate Bill 6232 was introduced on behalf of the governor.

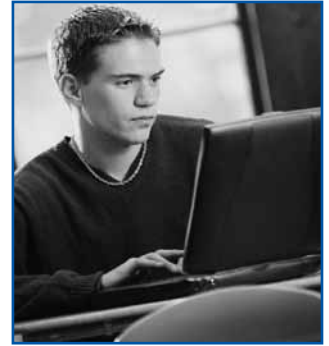
Of course, once the 2012 session began and the two bills received public hearings, it was time to roll up my sleeves and negotiate agreements on the pieces of my bill that I believe best moved Washington forward in improving student achievement. I pushed for "thinking outside the box." I focused on those areas that best served

the goal of improved student achievement to meet the needs of Washington businesses that compete globally.

I wanted to set the bar higher than just getting from point A to point B with a piece of paper.

I am happy to report that the final legislation strongly reflects my work. The new Student Achievement Council will:

- Develop a statewide strategic ten-year master plan for higher education and continually monitor progress in meeting the goals and priorities articulated in the plan.
- Use objective data to develop and recommend statewide policies to enhance availability, quality, efficiency and accountability of higher education in Washington.
- Serve as an advocate on behalf of students and Washington's higher education system to the governor, the Legislature and the public.
- Create a seamless system of public education geared toward student success by coordinating with the governing boards of the 4-year institutions, the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, the Office of Student Financial Assistance, the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board and the Superintendent of Public Instruction.



ADDRESSING NATIONAL HEALTH-CARE REFORM

As the ranking Republican member of the Senate Health and Long-Term Care Committee, I have been very involved in developing Washington's Health Care Benefit Exchange, a requirement under the federal health care reform act. An exchange is an online service that individuals and small businesses can use to quickly and easily compare insurance plans and choose the one that best fits their needs. It will work similar to Travelocity.com.

From the beginning I have taken a very cautious approach. There are risks to going too far too fast – both in terms of financial obligations for our state and because of the legal challenges filed against the federal act, which are now before the U.S. Supreme Court.

In 2011, the Legislature approved a bill to create the exchange. This year we needed to enact a few more provisions to move us toward federal certification, but the final form of the bill reaches beyond what is

necessary and I voted against it for this reason.

For more information on the exchange, please visit my website where I have posted my TVW Impact interview on the exchange and my TVW Inside Olympia segment on 2012 health care issues.



YELLOW-LIGHT INTERVALS TO BE STANDARDIZED STATEWIDE

I am very pleased to report that my bill to standardize yellow-light intervals at intersections across the state was signed into law this year. I introduced this bill because of constituent concerns that yellow-light intervals at photo-enforced intersections seemed shorter than at other intersections.

As I testified before the Senate Transportation Committee, I looked into this matter because I thought it was a fairness and safety issue. I discovered that people may unexpectedly stop on yellow lights at photo-enforced intersections because they worry the light will change to red faster. Sudden stops set up rear-end collision scenarios.

My bill adopts federal standards for yellow-light intervals at all state intersections. In addition, tickets issued through photo-enforcement may not exceed the monetary penalty for the same citation issued by a police officer – currently \$124. This new law takes effect on June 7, 2012.



“BLUE ALERT” SYSTEM TO AID LAW ENFORCEMENT AND PUBLIC

As a community, we have lost a number of heroes in recent years. These are events I'm sure none of us will ever forget.

The 2nd District was home to three of the four Lakewood police officers murdered on November 29, 2009. Maurice Clemens took the lives of Sergeant Mark Renninger and Officers Ronald Owens, Tina Griswold and Greg Richards.

In December 2009, we lost Pierce County Deputy Kent Mundell, who died from gunshot wounds when he and Deputy Nick Housner responded to a domestic violence report in Eatonville. Thankfully Deputy Housner survived.

On January 1, 2012, we lost Mount Rainier Park Ranger Margaret Anderson, who was shot and killed while attempting to stop a fleeing suspect near the Longmire Ranger Station.

This year, the Legislature approved a bill that will establish a statewide communications system to inform law enforcement and the public when anyone suspected of killing or injuring a police officer is at large. The system will be designed along the lines of the successful Amber Alert system, which activates an urgent bulletin in the most serious child-abduction cases. Aside from a suspect's danger to other officers, it is believed that a person who would murder a police officer is a great danger to anyone he or she encounters while escaping.

DISCOVER PASS TRANSFERABILITY TIED TO EXPANSION OF “OPT-OUT” DONATION TO STATE PARKS

One of the bills I introduced this year at the request of 2nd District citizens would have made the State Parks Discover Pass transferrable to a family's second vehicle. On January 27, the Senate approved a bill that did just that. In the end, this simple fix was rolled into an expansion of the “opt-out” \$5 state parks donation included in license tab renewal notices. The expansion includes license tab renewal notices for snowmobiles, commercial trailers, mopeds, ORVs, private use single-axle trailers and trucks, buses and for-hire vehicles with a gross weight of less than 12,000 pounds. Under “opt-out,” people can end up paying the \$5 for parks because they are not aware it is up to them to remove it from the total license tab fee.

- Creates an annual Family Discover Pass for \$50 that is transferrable to any vehicle;
- Adds access to recreational land managed by the Department of Natural Resources, except aquatic lands, for Discover Pass holders;
- Provides transferability to two vehicles for the holder of a Department of Fish and Wildlife Vehicle Access Pass; and
- Requires 12 “free” access days per year to state parks.

PARENT-INITIATED TREATMENT NOTIFICATION NOW REQUIRED

One of the saddest events parents can experience is losing a child to suicide. Yet, I heard from a family whose son committed suicide because he refused treatment for a mental health issue. The parents were not informed of their parent-initiated treatment option.

This was absolutely unacceptable to me and I introduced a bill in 2011 to ensure parents are always informed that they have the ability to obtain treatment for their son or daughter. My bill became law and implementation protocols had to be in place by December 1, 2011; a report to the Legislature is due at the end of this year.

Under this new law, mental-health professionals are required to advise parents of their rights and retain a copy of a signed form confirming the parents were so informed.

A facility which fails to provide notice is subject to a civil penalty of \$1,000 unless the facility is licensed by the Department of Health (DOH), in which case DOH is authorized to enforce this provision through its authority to deny, suspend, revoke, or modify the facility's license.

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